

Representative Condino and fellow Committee members:

I am Beth Morrison, President and CEO of HAVEN, Oakland County's center for the treatment and prevention of domestic and sexual violence. I am here this morning to fully endorse and support the Sexual Assault Victims' Forensic Medical Intervention and Treatment Fund before your committee today.

In 2002, HAVEN opened our START Program (Safe Therapeutic Assault Response Team) in response to a growing need in our community to address the evidence collection process from individuals who have experienced a sexual assault. START is modeled after Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) programs around the nation. Our program is a team approach that includes a certified SANE nurse or physician assistant with a counselor/advocate. This approach allows us to provide not only a thorough physical examination and evidence collection but also to provide crisis counseling, support and advocacy to the sexual assault survivor and their significant others. With a conviction rate of over 98%, we have proven that our evidence collection is of high quality and with over 750 survivors served in our five year history the need is apparent.

Since its inception HAVEN's START program has struggled to provide adequate ongoing stable funding. Initial start up funding was relatively easy to secure as many foundations and other funding sources are attracted to such new ventures. Maintaining ongoing funding has been both challenging and at times extremely difficult especially as we continue to deal with a struggling economy. We have been able to keep the doors open due to the generous and ongoing support of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, United Way for Southeastern Michigan, area women's groups, church groups and other community supporters.

House bills 5054, 5055, 5056 and 5057 will allow for a stabilized and predictable funding source for SANE programs in our state. This fund, although not a full solution to our funding difficulties, will provide existing programs a starting point, keeping us from beginning at ground zero each year. It will also allow us to continue to leverage funding from other sources as well as a sign to perpetrators that they will be held accountable for their violent act. Stabilized funding sources are a must or we will begin to see SANE programs in Michigan close their doors or limit their capacity to serve the community. A lack of long-term stable funding sources is also limiting the expansion of SANE programs into other communities, a disservice to the many survivors dealing with the trauma of sexual assault.

In summary, I'd like to share a brief story. A woman approached me at a charity event and shared that her teenage daughter had been raped and they found themselves at our START program. This mom said that although she would have rather been in thousand other places than START, she was so grateful that we existed. She shared that she too had been raped while in college nearly 20 years earlier and her roommates had taken her to a nearby emergency room. As her daughter was making the decision to go to START, this mom dreaded the experience that lied ahead for her – expecting a sterile, cold, fast paced, faceless ER experience. She said that she was overwhelmed with the warm, accepting, quiet, nurturing environment of START and was overcome with relief that at least her daughter would be spared a part of the trauma that she herself had experienced.

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